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Multimodal analysis of controversy in the media

Ruth Breeze

In a world dominated by the Internet, it is becoming increasingly important to develop analytical tools that can take in multiple dimensions of media texts. This chapter presents a multimodal analysis of a corpus of online newspaper texts about controversies surrounding the wearing of religious items by Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, which received considerable media coverage in Britain in early 2010. Although the text itself generally provides a balanced account of the issues, a comparison of the results across modes shows that the groups are evaluated differently in visual images, headlines and direct quotations. This study represents a step on the road to devising an integrative model for multimodal analysis.

1. Introduction

A considerable proportion of the vast volume of research into media language over recent years has given primacy to the printed text, which has been analysed at many levels, in terms of text linguistics, cohesion, lexical choice or macrostructure, and as a manifestation of ideological discourses operating on a societal plane. Even studies that focus specifically on how meaning is made generally take only one mode of media discourse into account at any given moment, usually centring on the printed word of media texts. However, in a world dominated by the Internet, it is becoming increasingly important to take in more aspects than the written word when analysing media phenomena. The aim of the present study is to use a small sample of texts on a controversial issue to trial a methodology for the multimodal analysis of online newspaper texts, focusing particularly on the evaluative function of the different elements.

2. Multimodal analysis

From a practical point of view, it is much easier to study printed text than to take multiple dimensions of media production into account: text remains stable over time, and a wide range of tools has been developed to extract data susceptible to analysis. Moreover, as linguists and discourse analysts, we are uniquely qualified to deal with written language. However, a glance at a media text in its natural environment – the page of a newspaper, a magazine article – should be enough to tell us that by focusing so narrowly on the written text, we are not doing justice to the media phenomenon in its fullest manifestation. The headline, the photographs, the page design, all contribute to the way that the text is presented to the readers, and this may influence the way readers draw on the text to build their own understanding of the phenomena that are represented on the page. Moreover, in a world that is increasingly dominated not by the printed media but by online communication, an exclusive focus on printed text is becoming somewhat anachronistic. A page in an Internet newspaper not only contains all the various modes of expression found on the printed page (headline, text, photograph or image, caption, advertising, layout) but also adds a few more (hyperlinks to related stories, discussion boards or comment boxes, hyperlinks of a ludic nature, interactive advertising, and so on). In such a scenario, text occupies a smaller proportion of the reader's attention, while headlines and images are foregrounded, and cumulative effects or interactions between different modes becomes increasingly important.

In what follows, I shall build on Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 21), who discuss how semiotic resources, which they term “modes”, are deployed to convey meaning. Modes are resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of interaction. In their view, modes are combined in “designs”, which are more or less deliberate combinations of different resources that are then “produced” on the page or screen and “distributed” to their addressees. This process can be understood as being stratified, beginning with content and discourse and moving through design to production and distribution. At each stage, there is input, but also feedback from other strata, since the designer is influenced by what he/she knows it is possible to produce, the producer interprets the designer's instructions but also adds meanings that flow from the physical process of articulation, and so on. Values and ideas, as well as availability of resources, will shape what is generated in the different modes (the writer's own ideas and his/her suppositions about what he/she is supposed to write will have a bearing on the text, the photographer will influence the images, the subeditor the headlines, the page designer the layout, and so on). The end-product of this will then be “read” by its addressees, who will bring their own resources into play in order to interpret it.

Given the complex nature of this process and the multiple participants, one could question the extent to which this complex process results in a coherent whole or “design”. Analysts have often assumed that the different elements do offer a certain coherence and consistency, but there is an evident danger of over-interpretation here, which is particularly acute in the case of media texts that are produced by several different professionals working to a tight deadline. In Kress and van Leeuwen’s view (2001: 20), multimodal phenomena involve the combination of several semiotic modes in the design and production of an event, and these modes may reinforce each other, fulfil complementary roles, or be hierarchically ordered. However, it is perhaps equally likely that the messages conveyed through different modes may be contradictory or inconsistent in the meanings and evaluations that they offer. Newspaper headlines do not always provide an accurate summary of the events reported in the article, and photographs are not always what they purport to be, just as the text itself is not always a reliable account of the events, quotations from participants are not a literal reflection of what they said, and so on (Richardson and Meinhof 1999). It is possible that an article which offers a balanced assessment of an issue might be found to have a headline with negative overtones, or a photograph that appears to show a positive vision of a particular issue, simply because of the time pressures in the production process. None the less, despite the apparently arbitrary nature of some of the combinations of text and image found in the media on a day-to-day basis, one may speculate that some configurations that might be thought of as “accidental” on one level actually reflect societal patterns of meaning-making and evaluation that operate on a broader scale.

Against this background, I decided to investigate multimodal reporting in the British online media, concentrating my attention on a particular controversial issue that hit the headlines in early 2010. The aim of this study was to develop a framework for multimodal analysis of online news articles, and to use this in a test case to compare the way different groups are represented in this medium, and to assess the extent to which this representation embodies coherent or contradictory evaluative patterns.

A key concept in any study of multimodality is that of the “mode”. My starting point is the definition by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 21) of modes as semiotic resources which allow the realization of discourses together with types of interaction. When dealing with online newspapers, the most important modes in the case of a particular section or article are the text, the photographs or images, and the headline. Headline and text are separate modes, because although both are realized through printed words, they formulate discourse in a different way, use a different code, and have a different communicative function. Arguably, text could also be subdivided into subcategories (opinion, narrative, personal testimony, and

so on, could be described as modes); however, for the purposes of this study, it proved impracticable to make such a division, since one newspaper text often has features of two or more of these, and it is unlikely to prove useful to separate them. The only exception to this was the specific attention paid to the role of direct quotation, which was taken to have particular relevance for reasons which will be set out below. Page design and hyperlinks were not taken into account in this study: they may also have semiotic significance, but they tend to be generic to the publication rather than specific to the particular article. This probably means that they tend to have a less important role in meaning-making as far as specific issues are concerned, and more relevance in terms of the online newspaper and its relationship with its readers across topics and sections. In short, the modes identified for research purposes were text in general, direct quotation of participants, headlines, and images.

In all of this, my main interest was to study how controversial issues were represented and evaluated in the different modes, and to explore any interactions or contradictions between modes, to determine whether the different modes supported or reinforced each other, or whether they tended rather to undermine or contradict each other. In other words, the aim was to investigate whether the modes signified in a way that was parallel (monologic, convergent) or whether they send messages that appeared to lead in different directions (heteroglossic, divergent). As I mentioned above, it is commonly assumed that the different modes are organized to transmit a single message expressing a consistent evaluation of the issue. Multimodal texts are thought to orchestrate specific effects by operating on various semiotic levels through different modes in a coordinated way. Since communication is understood to realize particular metafunctions, it may seem reasonable to take for granted that multimodal communication presupposes an integration of modes to a specific communicative end (O'Toole 1994: 169; Lim 2004: 222). This can be seen particularly clearly in the case of textbooks, for example, in which the image supports the explanations in the text, or in the case of advertisements, where messages that might initially appear contradictory tend to be resolved in a meaning that promotes the product through multiple semiotic layers (Royce 1998: 205), and through processes of inter-semiotic parallelism and polysemy (Liu and O'Halloran 2009: 368). However, in the case of online newspapers, which are produced under extreme time pressure through the coordinated actions of a team of diverse professionals, it is possible that contradictory or arbitrary messages and evaluations may be transmitted. In other words, co-occurrence of language and image may not always constitute a coherent multimodal message, and readers may make inferences that go beyond the visible and textual evidence simply because their expectations call for some logical connection or parallel (Liu and O'Halloran 2009: 379). At the very least, we should not assume that seeming

contradictions should be resolved in an intentionally orchestrated overarching meaning on the level of a particular news story, and we should endeavour not to overinterpret image-text relations that may be arbitrary. On the other hand, the possible inconsistencies that arise could indeed be significant in a broader view, because they provide insights into the way a particular newspaper, or even a particular sector of society, tends to view specific issues. For example, if we encounter instances where photographs appear to give a biased view, which undermines the balanced analysis provided in the text, we might come closer to understanding the dynamics of media discourse and its workings in society.

The different properties of text and image have been analysed in depth by authors such as Stöckl (2004, 2010) and Burger (2008). Stöckl (2010: 48–49) shows that images are dense in meaning and immediate in their cognitive and relational effect, but semantically vague and open-ended. A newspaper photograph may provoke an extreme negative reaction, or may generate a positive sensation and evoke sympathy or complicity, but usually does not prompt the viewer to undertake extensive analysis. By contrast, text is slow and abstract, but its linear, logical qualities and clear space-time orientation give it high definition and univocality. Evaluations in text can be simple, but they may also be extremely complex and nuanced. Building on this, and following the principle that headlines constitute a separate mode from text, it is possible to see that headlines in the English-language media stand somewhere between text and image, since they are eye-catching and make an immediate impact, yet are often impressionistic or allusive, even ambiguous, and may have emotive rather than ideational force (see Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of images, text and headlines in online newspapers

Image	Text	Headline
Eye-catching	Linear	Eye-catching
Relational	Slow	Emotive
Immediate	Abstract	Simultaneous
Emotive	Analytic/explicit	Impressionistic
Holistic/planes	Precise	Allusive
Simultaneous	Structured	Ambiguous
Open-ended	Indirect	
Ambiguous	Multimodal	
Concrete	Heteroglossic	

Nonetheless, the effects may vary across different instances. Moreover, the evaluative impact of each element (image, text, headline) may vary according to the relative salience of each one in a given case (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998:200), and the way in which they are grouped together.

I therefore decided to analyse the principal modes through which online newspapers express information and opinion. As explained below, I used different discourse analytical techniques to examine the text, headlines and images of news reports and opinion articles, and then compared the results obtained from investigation of each mode.

3. Sample and study

To carry out this study of multimodality in the online press, it was necessary to identify an issue that might bring to light contrasting evaluative discourses operating in different modes. It was therefore important to identify a topic that was polemical, and that might have a significant visual dimension. Since racism and bias against particular ethnic and religious groups have been identified as operating in covert form even in the mainstream media (van Dijk 1991, 1998; Richardson 2004), this appeared to offer a promising area for the study. In early 2010, the issue of the burka came to prominence in continental Europe, and was also a frequent subject in the British media. At the same time, several test cases were receiving considerable public attention, involving Sikhs and Christians who claimed the right to wear items of dress or jewellery for religious reasons, in contravention of dress codes in schools or workplaces. The decision was therefore made to examine the media reporting concerning the wearing of religious symbols by these three religious groups (Muslims, Sikhs and Christians). Searches were conducted on the online versions of four major British newspapers, namely the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sun* and the *Mirror*. These newspapers were selected because of their open availability, and because of their political and socio-economic profiles: two are quality broadsheets and two are popular tabloids, on the one hand, while two represent a more right-wing stance and two lean more to the left.

My search was directed to find references to the wearing of religious symbols by Sikhs, Christians and Muslims in news and opinion articles published in these newspapers during the period from 1 January to 30 June 2010. The results yielded 100 articles which mentioned or focused explicitly on the wearing of religious symbols by Sikhs (turban and kirpan) (12); Muslims (burka and niqab) (58); and Christians (cross or crucifix) (30). The articles contained a total of 25,923 words. Nineteen of the articles could be classified as opinion articles, while the others were news or feature articles. None of the articles was a leader. Headlines and text were analysed in all cases, and photographs when available. A brief overview of the articles used is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of articles by newspaper and religion

Newspaper	No. of words	Articles: Sikhs	Articles: Muslims	Articles: Christians
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	11,568	4	13	6
<i>Guardian</i>	43,940	7	22	16
<i>Sun</i>	7,207	0	14	4
<i>Mirror</i>	2,208	1	9	4

Regarding methodology, since different modes were to be explored, a range of methods had to be used, which could be combined under the heading of multimodal discourse analysis. For the text, a frames analysis was used, combined with quantitative and qualitative investigation of direct quotations attributed to the participants. For the headlines, categories were devised based on appraisal analysis and stance analysis. For the images, categories based on distance and angle were used.

4. Text analysis

4.1 Evaluative elements in text

For the textual analysis, the present study sets out from a cognitive analytical perspective informed by critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 1998) and frame theory (Entman 1993), adapting this approach specifically to the peculiarities of newspaper texts, which rarely provide a fully developed evaluation of a particular issue. Newspaper articles, with the possible exception of columns and leaders, tend to be heteroglossic in nature, containing a range of unresolved or even contradictory propositions or evaluations that bear traces of different discourses that have social currency (Maher 2001). In view of this, I applied the methodology described by Rojecki (2005: 67–68), which sets out from an identification of what could be termed “framing elements”, such as evaluative statements or causal connections, and proceeds to quantify their presence in the texts and assess the extent to which they form coherent frameworks within which an issue can be understood.

I conducted an initial reading of the entire corpus in order to identify the interpretive or non-factual elements that could potentially be functioning as part of an evaluative framework. These elements were listed, and then compared with each other so that I could prevent duplication and discard elements that occurred infrequently. Each article was coded for the evaluative elements which it contained, in order to determine how many articles contained each of the elements that had been identified. The number of times one element occurred within a particular article was not counted.

Table 3. Rank order of elements in corpus

Rank	Element	No. of articles where element occurs
1	“people have the right to wear RS”	43
2	“RS pose a threat to (mainstream) values”	32
3	“other EU countries are intolerant”	31
4	“RS pose safety or security problems”	28
5	“the state persecutes religious believers”	24
6	“different religions are being treated differently”	21

Table 3 shows the rank order of the most frequently occurring evaluative elements overall in this sample. It is noticeable that the element “people have the right to wear religious symbols” is particularly prominent. However, detailed examination of the corpus showed that this element was more frequent in the context of Sikhs and Christians, and less so in the case of Muslims. The issue of “different religious groups being treated differently” occurs more frequently in the reporting of cases concerning Christians. Comparisons are often made between what seems to be lenience when enforcing dress codes on Muslims or Sikhs, and apparent strictness towards Christians. Moreover, it is noticeable that the elements referring to religious symbols as “constituting a threat to safety” or “contradicting values”, are mentioned most frequently in the case of Muslims. It is possible to conclude that text is multilayered, but usually gives different points of view: both sides of the question are represented. It is significant that people’s right to wear RS is the most frequent element encountered in all three cases, although this is often found in combination with negative appraisals of wearing RS. However, it is also interesting that text concerning Sikhs is likely to mention Britain’s tradition of tolerance, while text concerning Muslims is likely to mention a “threat” to security or to values, and text concerning Christians is often partisan and expresses a view supporting or opposing the wearing of religious symbols.

4.2 Voice

One important aspect of media texts is the way in which they may quote from their sources (Ducrot 1984). In my case, it was particularly important to establish how the actual participants in the various cases, that is, the wearers of the RS, were given a “voice” in the text. A quantitative study was carried out of the number of words attributed in direct quotation to the wearers of RS, to their supporters, and to their opponents. In general, the newspapers had far more direct quotations from wearers of RS and their supporters in the case of Sikhs and Christians, and more quotations from opponents of the wearing of RS in the case of Muslims.

Table 4 shows the number of words attributed to members of three different categories: wearers of RS, supporters of those who wear RS, and people who are against the wearing of RS. In a few cases, one person met the criteria for the first two categories, so an attempt was made in each instance to determine whether he or she was speaking personally as a wearer, or as a supporter of the right to wear this symbol in general. As will be seen, the number of words attributed to the different categories of speaker varies greatly across the four publications. However, as we shall see, the number of words is not necessarily indicative of the position adopted in the article in question.

Table 4. Number of words in direct quotations attributed to participants

	Wearer of RS	In favour of wearing RS	Against wearing RS
<i>Telegraph</i>			
Sikhs	187	407	0
Muslims	6	149	310
Christians	382	409	257
<i>Guardian</i>			
Sikhs	79	160	0
Muslims	0	49	954
Christians	285	365	41
<i>Sun</i>			
Sikhs	0	0	0
Muslims	604	14	307
Christians	232	44	0
<i>Mirror</i>			
Sikhs	0	7	0
Muslims	8	0	113
Christians	54	202	0

It is important to mention that just because certain actors are quoted extensively does not mean that the newspaper is validating or even propagating their opinion. In fact, the opposite may be the case, since some of the long quotations in the present sample can only be understood as “scare quotes”: the most striking example of this is the considerable space that the *Guardian* devotes to citing far-right politicians. In general, the function of direct quotations attributed to participants in the reported events seems to be to make an impact on the reader, either appealing directly in a positive way, or shocking the audience and provoking a negative reaction. However, one important point emerges from this sample, which is that except in the *Sun*, the voices of Muslim women who wear the burka or niqab are almost entirely absent: others talk about them, but their views are not given at first hand.

4.3 Headlines

The headlines from all the articles were examined and categorized according to the principles of appraisal analysis (Martin and Rose 2003; Martin and White 2005) and categorization of stance (Hyland 2005). Predictably, the two popular newspapers (*Sun* and *Mirror*) opted for sensational lexis with a heavy affective load in many cases, particularly in the case of stories about Muslims, which often had headlines containing phrases such as “burka rage”, “burka backlash” and “race hate”. However, the two more serious newspapers (*Guardian* and *Telegraph*) also made such choices at times. The *Guardian* printed some provocative headlines in the case of all three religious groups, whereas the *Telegraph* published occasional provocative headlines on stories about Muslims and Christians, and opted for neutral or “feelgood” headlines in the case of Sikhs.

Headlines that made the newspaper’s own stance very clear were mainly found in the *Guardian*, which published several headlines that drew attention to “Islamophobia”, as in the example “All parties must stand up to Islamophobia”, and declared that “Europe must not ban the burka”. Nonetheless, the *Guardian* seemed openly to oppose Christians who wore religious symbols, with several headlines to that effect, such as “Secret Christian donors bankroll Tories”, “There is no case for faiths to get special treatment in court” and “BA should be free to ban the cross”. The *Mirror* came out in the opposite direction, with a headline associated with the story about the Christian nurse who was fired for refusing to take off a cross, that declared boldly “Remind me, what country am I living in?” Headlines in the *Telegraph* were occasionally partisan, but only on the subject of Muslim dress: “It’s not in our interest to ban the burka”, or “Tearing veils off women will help no one”. The *Sun*, too, offered a partisan headline on the subject of the French burka ban: “Freedom? Equality? Not for Muslims”. Otherwise, the overwhelming majority of the headlines in all the newspapers were neutral, expressed no particular opinion, and refrained from using emotive vocabulary.

4.4 Images

The articles were all associated with photographs, except in the case of the *Mirror*, which routinely only includes a brief text with a headline in the online “news” section where these articles were published.

The difficulty of identifying and classifying evaluation in images has been discussed by many authors (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; O’Halloran 2004; Stöckl 2004). I first carried out a qualitative examination of the images associated with the articles about the different religious groups, in order to identify possible

evaluative features. Attractive colours and appealing images were mainly associated with Sikhs, whereas photographs showing Muslims tended to use darker colours and favoured use of oblique angles. Christians were photographed in portrait or close-up mode, in a simulation of direct eye-contact with the reader. In this, the way in which the people were photographed seemed to be of key significance. Not only was there an obvious contrast between “offer” and “demand” photographs (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 121–130), but in the case of the “demand” photograph, there appeared to be a major difference between photographs with “parallel gaze”, in which the viewer is addressed with a “visual ‘you’” who is on equal terms, and other photographs in which high-angle shots make the viewer seem to be looking down on the person photographed, or oblique shots position the subject at an angle to the viewer. It was also notable that the most predictable format for a photograph in a human interest story (close-up, parallel gaze) was generally used to accompany articles about Christians, but was far from being the norm as far as Muslims were concerned. Table 5 summarizes the characteristics of photographs featuring members of the three religious groups. It should be noted that the table only includes photographs representing members of the religious groups in questions. Photographs of other actors, such as politicians, are not included in the analysis, nor are photographs of objects. It should be noted that close-up is defined as head or head and shoulders; full figure as whole body occupying the frame (sometimes known as medium long-shot); middle distance as full human figure occupying about half the height of the frame (sometimes known as long-shot).

Table 5. Analysis of images of people wearing RS

	Colour: >30% Colour	Distance: C: Close-up FF: Full figure: MD: Medium distance	Eye contact: P: Parallel O: Oblique S: Smile	Posture: BC: Back to camera FT: Face turned away FL: Face wholly covered
Sikhs (6)	6	3C; 3FF	3P; 2S	0
Muslims (24)	9	13C; 9FF; 2MD	7P; 7O; 3S	2BC; 4FT; FC
Christians (10)	7	7C; 2FF; 1MD	5P; 2O	0

It can be seen from Table 5 that of the six photographs showing Sikhs, all had colour in over 30% of the image, three were close-ups and three full-figure shots, and the subjects of three made parallel eye contact with the reader, while two were smiling.

Although the table suggests that many photographs of Muslims showed women with a parallel gaze, some of whom were smiling, it should be noted that

all of these were from the *Sun*, while none of the other newspapers included photographs of Muslim women in these poses. It was notable that both the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* recycled the same agency photographs to accompany different stories. The *Telegraph* favoured a photograph of a woman's head, completely covered except for the eyes, which are looking up to the reader from a lower position. This image occurred four times in the present sample, in association with various different, unrelated reports. The *Guardian* used two images more than once: a photograph of a burka-wearer by the Eiffel Tower, with her back to the camera, and a photograph of a burka-wearer in profile, looking down. The subservient or gaze-avoiding posture and dramatic colour scheme of many of the pictures seem to tell a story of their own: unlike text, which has to spell out its ideas in a logical and coherent fashion, images transmit messages in an implicit manner (Naciscione 2010). It appears that here, although the writer subscribes to principles of tolerance and *laissez faire* (if a woman wants to cover herself up, she has the right to do so), the photographs are sending an implicit message that the burka is a symbol of subservience or rejection of western values.

From this, it is possible to conclude that the photographs used in conjunction with the articles in this study tended to tell a rather different story from the text. The photographs associated with these news stories tend to have divergent effects in the case of the three religious groups. Sikhs are felt to be photogenic, and the images accompanying stories about them are picturesque. Muslim apparel presents a challenge to the photographer, and many of the images are disconcerting or even sinister, mainly with more than 30% of the image in dark colours or black, and with subjects who do not make eye contact with the reader, or who do so by looking upwards or sideways at the camera. That this type of image is not an inevitable artefact of the burka itself is amply demonstrated by the *Sun*, which features a considerable number of positive, colourful images of Muslim women in burkas or veils, who are smiling, and who make eye contact with the reader. It was also noticeable that the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* both tended to reuse certain negatively charged images of burka wearers, which could contribute to the reinforcement of a stereotypical view of this social group. Finally, in the case of Christians, the photographs tended to comply with the more usual newspaper practice in human interest stories, by showing the subjects in close-up or portrait style, making parallel eye contact with the reader. Given the subject matter, it is perhaps inevitable that the "normality" of the images of Christian subjects contrasts with the "exotic" nature of the photographs taken of the other two groups. However, the lack of parallel eye contact in the case of Muslim women, except in the images from the *Sun*, marks a striking difference which merits further discussion. On the one hand, the woman who wears a burka does so precisely because she wishes to avoid the public gaze. In a sense, the images which show such women with their face completely covered,

their back to the camera, or turning away, give a true reflection of the semiotics of this form of dress. On the other hand, the persistent use of these images in the press is likely to reinforce stereotypes about burka wearers, and is certainly not conducive to breaking down barriers surrounding Muslim women.

This study of the images echoes the message transmitted through the use of direct “voice” in these articles, in which Muslim women are shown to be almost wholly silent. Not only do they lack a media “voice”, they also lack a media “face”, in the sense that their images are often covered or obscured, they may have their back to the camera so that eye-contact is ruled out, or they may be photographed looking upwards in a position that indicates subservience. The only notable exception to both of these trends was a single, long article, published in the *Sun*, which included several close-up or portrait shots of a woman in a burka who is smiling and making eye-contact with the reader, going out with her family, and so on. This feature article contains a long interview in which she explains her opinions about wearing the burka, and tells stories about the prejudices she has had to combat in France.

5. Discussion

In the case that was selected here, namely the wearing of religious symbols by three different groups, it is evident that my analysis of the evaluative discourses used would vary, depending on which modes of expression are in focus. A cognitive frames analysis of the text alone shows that the reporting is fairly balanced, and that most journalists favour a neutral or non-committal stance, preferring to mention the arguments used by both sides in the dispute, and, where possible, provide direct quotations from their representatives. However, a study that takes in the use of images and headlines, such as the present paper, paints a rather different picture. In what follows, I shall review the main findings drawn from analysis of each mode.

A quantitative analysis of the propositions expressed in the text demonstrates that the actual reporting is reasonably balanced and neutral. At least in terms of the actual ideas expressed in the text, almost all articles contain an attempt at explaining several points of view on the controversial topic at issue, and tolerance of different viewpoints is a major theme in most reports. The writers take care not to give one-sided negative or positive evaluations of the phenomena at hand. Representatives of both sides of the question are generally quoted directly. However, there is noticeably a lack of direct representation of one category of participant in the events reported, namely Muslim women who wear the burka or niqab.

On the other hand, the headlines of the articles across all the newspapers are often more emotive, and sometimes more partisan. This is arguably extremely important, since headlines make an immediate impact, and in an online format they may be the only part of the report that is visible before the page containing the story itself is called up. As we have seen, despite the balanced reporting, the headlines in some newspapers presented a biased evaluation of the issue, or tended to provoke strongly negative emotional reactions. For example, a report in the *Guardian* which is headed “Europe must not ban the burka” actually presents several complex arguments about the interaction between individual freedom and women’s rights, and is by no means in favour of the burka. However, readers who only see the headline will not receive this impression.

Finally, the photographs associated with these news stories often have different effects. Sikhs are evidently highly photogenic, and images of Sikhs are often colourful action shots or full body shots with parallel eye contact. Burkas are indisputably a challenge to the photographer, and although it may be inevitable that such images lack colour or facial expressiveness, the type of angle used is particularly striking, with a prevalence of back views or high-angle shots. On the other hand, Christians are closer to the usual newspaper “human interest” subject that invites readers to identify with the subject, and their images tend to invite sympathy or complicity with the reader. Although the contrast between exotic and everyday images may well be an artefact of the subject itself, one aspect is particularly significant: except in the *Sun*, Muslim women photographed in these newspapers never make parallel eye contact with the reader. The persistent use of shots from a high angle or with no eye contact, or even back views, is not likely to break down stereotypes about burka wearers. On the basis of the current sample it would be no exaggeration to say that Muslim women are not only voiceless, but also often faceless, in the mainstream media.

Previous authors have drawn attention to the iconicity and indexicality of photographs, which “come with an implicit guarantee of being closer to the truth than other forms of communication” (Messaris and Abraham 2001: 217). Photographs tend to diminish the likelihood that viewers will question a particular vision of the events, since it is more difficult to question what one can see than to doubt a proposition. This means that the role that photographs play in the framing process tends to be that of narrowing down the possible interpretations and swaying the viewer/reader towards a particular view. Although Barthes (1977: 39) concluded that text generally “anchors” the implicit meanings of images to help readers form the appropriate inferences from the “floating chain” of possible concepts that are signified, it is likely that this applies more strictly to carefully developed media products, such as advertisements, and is less applicable in the case of items that are produced under pressure by diverse teams of professionals, such as online news.

Messariss and Abraham (2001:221) have shown that television images may activate stereotypes in direct contradiction to the explicit messages contained in the spoken text of the broadcast. It may thus be possible to claim that images can also “anchor” text, or rather, that images may complement, colour or undermine the messages that are being transmitted verbally. As van Dijk noted (1988: 18), “symbolic racism allows for subtlety, indirectness, implication. It may, paradoxically, be expressed by the unsaid.” In the case of the groups represented in this study, it is possible that the message of openness and tolerance expressed in the text is undermined by the alienating evaluative effect of the images that are frequent in some of the newspapers.

6. Conclusions

The present study set out to trial a methodology for the multimodal analysis of online newspaper texts, using a small sample of texts on a controversial issue. The conclusions, obtained by applying different methodologies to the different modes and then contrasting the results, are interesting in themselves. However, they also point to the initial problem posed at the beginning of this chapter, which is that of conducting a multimodal analysis and trying to interpret the way divergent messages may be transmitted through different modes.

When analysing these multimodal texts, it is not appropriate to assume co-equal status between the different modes. On the one hand, photographs and headlines are salient, and constitute the locus of attention on the screen. Photographs have a heavy interpersonal and emotive load, while headlines may be emotive and connotative, ideational but ambiguous. Text is mainly ideational, but also contains interpersonal and emotive elements. To understand how meaning is constructed and communicated through media texts, we must take into account what is expressed in these different modes, and how the mode of expression affects the kind of effect that is produced. For example, the choice of dramatic photographs might tend to undermine the tolerant message expressed in the text, and repeated use of the same photograph in different contexts might tend to reinforce stereotypes. However, it is not clear which of the messages will prevail in the reader’s understanding of the issue, or indeed how the reader will integrate the different aspects that are juxtaposed on the screen.

A new, integrative model is required that can account for all these modes and their simultaneous operation. To build such a model, a more comprehensive theory of reader response needs to be developed. More empirical evidence is needed about how people read or use online newspapers, and how they may be influenced by them. Our intuition might be that headlines and photographs are more

salient, but it remains to be established how much they contribute to the developing social understanding of issues that are in the public eye. The mismatch which is often evident between text, which is analytical and tolerant, and photographs, which tend to reinforce prejudices, poses certain difficulties of interpretation for the reader. Whichever mode he/she encounters first, he/she will undertake a process of recontextualization rather than co-contextualization (Liu and O'Halloran 2009: 385) to try to "make sense" of the article, which may not actually result in a coherent outcome. It is interesting to think that the rational cognitive message is transmitted through text, but that this may be undermined by a more visceral, emotive message sent through images. Assuming a naive reader response, the result could be intellectual assent to the principles of tolerance, undermined by emotional discomfort with situations that one is supposed to tolerate. However, without further inquiry into the dynamics of reader response, it is not easy to deliver a definitive verdict on this point.

From the discourse analyst's point of view, it is possible to conclude that further empirical research of this kind is needed in order to test appropriate methodologies for multimodal investigation, and to foster our own developing understanding of online news as a multimodal phenomenon.

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